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Soviets on U.S. Arms

Published Study Portrays Reagan as Threat to Peace

By Dusko Doder
Washington Post Foreign Service

MOSCOW, Jan. 17—The Soviet Union has published a detailed document on U.S. military strength in an extraordinary effort to convince Europeans and Americans that President Reagan's policies are threatening world peace.

"Whence the Threat to Peace?" published by the Defense Ministry, depicts a huge and expanding U.S. military machine in the hands of a reckless administration bent on achieving strategic superiority over the Soviet Union.

The notion that the Americans are set on achieving first-strike nuclear capability is the centerpiece in the 78-page booklet published in Russian and six other languages, including English.

Tailored for a popular audience, the booklet is devoid of ideology and full of comparisons of strategic and conventional forces of the superpowers. It challenges Reagan administration contentions that the Soviets have achieved military superiority over the United States.

The publication concedes Soviet advantages in some areas such as ground forces but contends that the United States is well ahead in warships and aircraft carriers, combat planes and foreign military bases.

In an introduction, the authors say the booklet was prepared as a response to a Pentagon study of Soviet military power issued in September.

In November, the Soviets published a document called "The Threat to Europe," which dealt with the balance of atomic weapons. In that publication, the Soviets asserted that the East and West had reached a rough balance of power in Europe and that NATO's planned deployment of intermediate-range missiles would tip the European balance against them by 50 percent.

Largely due to its lack of systematic comparison, the document issued by the Pentagon created the impression of almost overwhelming Soviet military might.

Significantly, the Soviets did not challenge any facts in the Pentagon study. Rather, they said, they wanted to counter "tendentially selected and deliberately distorted" information about Soviet strength "to show the military potential of the other side so that true conclusions could be drawn on the basis of comparative data."

The new Soviet document, a slick booklet that is almost the mirror image of the Pentagon's "Soviet Military Power," includes photographs and artists' renditions of U.S. weapons systems.

Along with data provided by Soviet intelligence sources, the booklet uses information provided by official U.S. publications and the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies. Western experts said information was generally in line with data available in the West.

The booklet, however, integrated figures and weapons capabilities with doctrinal issues to produce a "fairly persuasive propaganda document," according to Western observers who have read it.

The content is consistent with the message the Kremlin leaders have been trying to convey to Western Europe. "People in the West," it concluded, "will be able to see for themselves where the threat to peace really comes from" after reading the booklet.

Illustrating the "offensive" character of U.S. strategic doctrine, it quoted Reagan's October 1981 statement about a possible limited nuclear exchange. It said the "defensive" character of Soviet doctrine was made clear in President Leonid Brezhnev's statement condemning any use of nuclear weapons as a "capital crime against humanity" and vowing that the Soviet Union will never be the first to use them.

The booklet then contends that the notion of limited nuclear exchange is "no more than a variant of the first-strike concept."

At the moment, according to the booklet, the two superpowers, "like the countries of Europe belonging to the opposite military alliances, are at a point of relative equilibrium in military capabilities."

But the United States has refused to ratify the SALT II agreement and the Reagan administration is seeking to "upset the equilibrium" to gain "superiority."

The Soviets cited as proof of hostile U.S. intentions the development of MX and Trident II missiles, which they described as "first-strike" weapons.

As part of an "aggressive, confrontational strategy," it added, the United States plans

to deploy new medium-range nuclear rockets in Europe.

"The balance of strategic forces between the United States and the Soviet Union would be tipped, too, because the new U.S. missiles would be strategic weapons in relation to the Soviet Union," it continued.

In particular, Pershing II missiles with a range of 1,700 miles and "pinpoint accuracy" could strike Soviet targets within "five to six minutes of launching," which "alters the strategic situation considerably."

While the United States claims that the new missiles are intended for the defense of Western Europe, the report said, Washington "actually intends to use them to strike preemptive blows at Soviet ICBMs" and other "vital" strategic targets.

It dismissed U.S. claims of Soviet strategic gains by quoting former president Jimmy Carter and other senior American officials as saying two years ago that rough parity existed between the two countries.

"Could the Soviet Union, in only one or two years, have achieved superiority and a substantial superiority at that, in strategic arms that require years and years to produce?" it asked.

The report made these points and contentions:

- It conceded that Moscow has an advantage in ground forces but said this was due to the huge Soviet frontier and to the threat from China "with its growing nuclear potential and the largest army in the world."

- While conceding "improved" technical and combat capability of the Soviet Navy, it noted that Western countries have 25 aircraft carriers "and air-capable ships" while Moscow has only two, "designed principally for antisubmarine warfare."

- While the Warsaw Pact nations have "more small-surface ships with a limited cruising range," the report said that the NATO countries have "almost three times as many battle ships, cruisers, destroyers and missile frigates."

- Warsaw Pact nations have an advantage in the number of submarines, 385 compared to NATO's 279 and a substantial advantage in the number of mine sweepers.

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